



# Children & Family News

February 2006

*N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update*

## Child Welfare Outcomes Improve Measurably

Child welfare services in North Dakota have improved steadily since the 2001 federal Child and Family Service Review. No state met all of that review's high standards, but North Dakota came the closest to passing. As a

result, states implemented program improvement plans. North Dakota's plan included the full rollout of wraparound services, the implementation of the Single Plan of Care (SPOC), the adoption of a regional review process mirroring the federal review, and numerous trainings.

This month, federal officials released North Dakota from its program improvement plan.

Children and Family Services Division Director Paul Ronningen praised the combined work of staffs from the county social service offices, the department's regional human service centers, other partnering organizations, and the state office.

According to Ronningen, North Dakota's efforts have:

- Raised North Dakota's score on the 23 items of the federal Child and Family Service Review from 83 percent in 2001 to 98.3 percent in 2005;
- Positioned the state to pass three of the five national child welfare standards and put the state within two percentage points of passing the other two.

In addition, the implementation of SPOC – a web-based treatment plan – benefited children and families because services between agencies are better coordinated, families participate in plan creation, and all efforts are focused on

permanency goals. SPOC also allowed counties to claim (be reimbursed for) \$485,000 in Medicaid funds during 2005. This represented new revenue.

The state's performance is measured using data from the foster care payment system known as CCWIPS, SPOC, and the in-state regional Child and Family Service Reviews.

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## SPOC Enhancements

The Single Plan of Care (SPOC), which was developed with input from the Division of Juvenile Services, county social service offices, regional human service centers, PATH, and other partners, is being enhanced.

Feedback from partners led to the creation of a work group last spring, which meets quarterly to direct needed changes.

Reprogramming began in December 2005 to address the problem of "white paper" on the treatment plans, and to add a "spell checker" feature. These changes are in the test stages now and should be available later this month. This will eliminate the extra blank pages currently being generated, which have caused some concern and public criticism.

Other planned changes to SPOC include adding an edit feature to the outcome area of the treatment plan, and increasing the data entry access of other treatment team members. A drop down list of addresses will also be added to reduce data entry time. These last three changes are expected to become available this spring.

Children and Family Services Division Director Paul Ronningen said the web-based treatment plan is providing outcome data that wasn't readily available before, and remains a very valuable tool in helping North Dakota provide quality child welfare services to children and families.

**Over→**

## Families and Wraparound

Wraparound is a process that focuses on individualized, strength-based, needs-driven planning and service delivery in child welfare situations. Wraparound and SPOC are core components of the state's child welfare system.

According to regional reviewers who monitor how North Dakota measures up to national child welfare standards, when the wraparound process and the single plan of care are utilized properly, cases meet national Child and Family Service Review standards.

When reviewing cases during the in-state regional review process, families involved with wraparound and a single care plan, said:

- They had a voice and choice in services;
- Strengths were identified and used;
- Needs were identified and met through individualized planning;
- Services and supports put in place were adequate to meet family needs; and
- The process emphasized the importance of teams and the inclusion of natural supports.

## Pew Commission Urges Collaboration

North Dakota is one of 15 states building collaboration between court systems and child welfare systems to better serve children and families in the foster care

system. In January, Pew Commission Deputy Director Sue Badeau came to Bismarck to discuss this and other commission recommendations with court and child welfare professionals. Her presentation was held in conjunction with the first meeting of a new Children's Justice Initiative Task Force that North Dakota Chief Justice Gerald VandeWalle has convened to develop statewide recommendations.

Attorney Tara Muhlhauser, the court improvement specialist for the department's Children and Family Services Division, explained the importance of strengthening working relationships. "The courts are involved when children go into care and with permanency decisions; and they are active partners in the delivery of child welfare services."

The state's foster care caseload is growing, and the department is placing an increased emphasis on kinship care and family foster care. On January 6, 2006, there were 1,261 children in foster care in North Dakota, and 908 licensed foster parents (including family homes, PATH homes, and tribal affidavit homes).

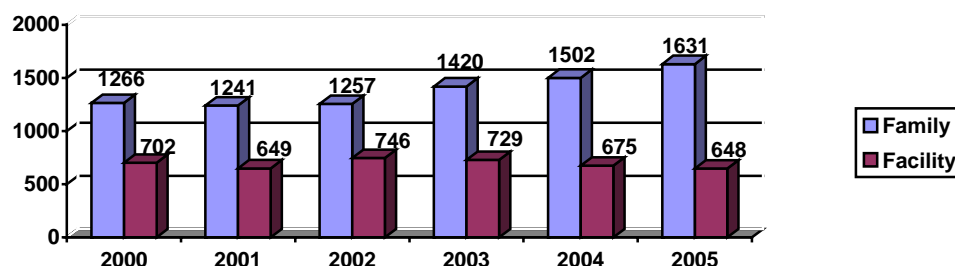
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## Trends: Family Foster Care\* & Group Home/Facility Placements in N.D.

By Federal Fiscal Year

- Family and relative placements are growing ; institutional placements are declining.
- The N.D. child welfare system is committed to providing children with safety, permanency, and well-being in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting.



\* Family Foster care includes family foster homes, relative placements, pre-adoptive placements, and tribal affidavit foster home placements.